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# At What Cost?

## The untoward costs of children's schooling in Rwanda: An in-depth case study

JULY 2013

Prepared by
Timothy P. Williams, MSW, MSc

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**TIMOTHY P. WILLIAMS**

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# FOREWORD

As Chair of the Rwanda Education NGOs Coordination Platform (RENCP), Plan Rwanda is pleased to present this report, "At what cost? The untoward costs of children's schooling in Rwanda." The report offers a compelling case study for how different education-related costs and expenditures continue to impact upon the lives and schooling experiences of children in Rwanda. This report is distinct from many other research projects in that it centers upon the voices and perspectives of children. It should remind us that when we consider the perspectives of education stakeholders, the perspectives of children must be among them.

The report exemplifies how different actors within the education sector can work to achieve mutual goals. The impetus for this project was inspired and informed through regular RENCP meetings and ongoing discussions with other leading organizations actively working within Rwanda's education sector.

It is our hope that this report will be used as a tool by those working within the education sector of Rwanda to strengthen education-related programming and advocacy. By improving our understanding of the types of costs that children and their caregivers may encounter, we can better anticipate the obstacles which may impede children's experiences of education. This report also makes a positive and meaningful contribution to our ongoing dialogue, advocacy, and collaboration with the Ministry of Education and its affiliates. It can help us to thoughtfully examine and explore different ways in which the Government of Rwanda's goal of universal access to children's education can be more fully realized.

Peter van Dommelen
Country Director
Plan Rwanda

*'I would like to tell you something. Education at our school is not free.'*

– Female student, 16, Senior 3, 12YBE

*'So if school is free in Rwanda, it should be free, and if not, parents should know it.'*

- Male Parent, 41

*'I don't think there is a parent who doesn't wish his or her child to be in school. But when they fail to get the means, that is when a child drops out of the school.'*

- Mother of a child no longer enrolled in school

*'In the first term, we pay 2000 rwf for PTA. Then the second term they are asked to pay 3000 for registration for the national examination, then they pay another 2000 for PTA [in the second term]. Then we pay 500 for photos. Then we pay 1000 for mock examination for Senior 3 students. Then you add 5000 for the food and accommodation during the national examination ... There was a child that was in our class. He left the school to work for that money. But he paid only 3000 for registration for national examination and wasn't able to pay the other money. So he just stayed home.'*

- Male student, 17, Senior 3, 12YBE

*'I am the one who buys myself clothes, books, and pens. I pay for my PTA. Everything I take care of myself. What my parents have given me is only a small land so that I can dig. I get anything I need from there. How I do that? I come to school like three days in a week and then the other two days I dig.'*

– Male student, 14, Primary 6

*'Please ask MINEDUC to talk with our teachers about PTA to at least be patient and not send our children away because they have not paid it. It has a great impact on our children's studies because they really miss a lot when they are sent away.'*

- Female parent, 40, Social Affairs Officer

*'All the supporters left us because of this nine years basic education. They have heard that it is free and decided to stop supporting.'*

- Male student, 13, Primary 6

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

This study was initiated by the Rwanda Education NGO Coordination Platform. It received funding support from Plan International/Plan Canada via the Canadian International Development Agency. This report was prepared by Timothy P. Williams, MSW, MSc, Plan Rwanda consultant and lead researcher for the project. Field-based data collection was carried out by a team of six local assistants from Max Impact Consulting, Ltd. including Valens RUTAZIHANA, Adelithe MUGABO, Godlive MUKANKURANGA, Zayana UWASE, Eugene NTEZIARENYE, and Aaron TWAGIRAYESU. Alfred MUPENZI of Plan Rwanda provided essential conceptual, methodological, and logistical support throughout. Kate Kenny made important contributions toward the preparation of the literature review.

On 5 November 2012, a findings validation workshop was held in Kigali. It was attended by members of RENCP who reviewed a preliminary draft of the report. Feedback and recommendations from that meeting have been integrated into the present document. On 30 May 2013 a draft of this report was formally presented at the education cluster meeting at the Ministry of Education attended by the Honorable Minster of Education and Director General of the Rwanda Education Board, respectivery. Feedback was also received from the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research.

Utmost gratitude is extended to study participants for their thoughtful contributions toward making this project a rich and meaningful endeavor.

# CONTENTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study emerged from an observation made by some members of RENCP who are actively involved in supporting children's education: many school-age children continue to contend with a range of costs that impact upon their educational experience – an observation that not only problematizes the conventional understanding of Rwanda's fee-free education policy but also poses serious challenges for those organizations seeking to effectively support the education-related requirements of young people.

It was through this observation that the idea first emerged for a research study that explores the user costs of children's schooling in Rwanda. While recent studies have strengthened an understanding of how school costs can have regional variation (IPAR 2012), what remains less clear is firstly, a more complete understanding of the range of education-related costs incurred by children and families; and secondly, how such costs come to impact upon children's lives and engagement in school. The present study seeks to shed light into this issue using an approach that privileges the perspectives and insights of children themselves.

This study was guided by the following question: *'In light of MINEDUC's current education policy of fee-free schooling, what costs do young people continue to incur and to what extent might these costs impact upon children's educational experience?'*

This study is ambitious in aim and realistic in scope: rather than draw from a national sample of children or schools, we opted for an in-depth social science case study approach that permitted us to explore the particular dimensions of

our inquiry in-depth within one sector in Rwanda's Eastern Province. Approximately 65 interviews and focus groups were undertaken with a wide range of local education stakeholders such as local leaders, members of civil society, head teachers, parents, and schoolchildren, as well as school-age children not regularly attending school.

Study findings paint a complex picture around children's experiences of school costs. To be sure, the 'usual suspects' of school-related costs were frequently raised: the enduring struggle of young people and families to secure access to basic school materials such as uniforms, books, and pens. Also identified were a number of other school-related expenses such as parent-teacher association (PTA) contributions, mock exam fees, purchasing reams of paper for the school, passport photos for exams, registration fees, and school reports, among others. Such costs were reported to pose serious challenges for successful school attendance, performance, and completion.

Many participants, particularly children and parents, articulated how their own understanding of MINEDUC's fee-free approach to education conflicted with what they have come to experience and observe within their own schools and community. We learned of numerous accounts of children sent home from school for failing to pay school-related costs such as PTA, arriving at school without essential materials such as a pen or notebook, or being unable to provide an examination-related expense. Being sent home was often characterized as an informal, temporary measure but one that ultimately impacted the educational lives, trajectories, and even aspirations of children. The impact of being sent home was situated in a number of ways but ultimately increased the likelihood of school failure, repetition, and/or dropout. Parents interviewed for this study spoke at length about how quickly school costs can multiply, especially for those large families without a consistent source of income.

School costs were talked about as impacting the way children came to think about their own educational trajectories. For instance, for a student in Primary 6 struggling to pay the 200 rwf per-term PTA contribution expected of her, the costs for entering Senior 1 were daunting, as the amount increased tenfold per term. Consequently, we found evidence of children and families downsizing their education-related aspirations– an untoward effect that participants linked both directly and indirectly to school-related costs.

This study provides evidence that costs continue to operate as a key determinant of children's overall educational experience, a particular finding that would seem to disproportionately impact the most economically dis-

advantaged families. Poverty served as an enduring challenge, making any school-related expense all-the-more pronounced. Most children (including those not currently in school) and other participants spoke of the high importance of receiving an education as a key to success in Rwanda today. Yet aspirations were often mediated by the economic realities of families who must calculate the cost of sending their children to school versus having them engage in other activities to support themselves or their families. This study found school costs continued to figure in prominently in this decision-making process.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Advocacy and awareness-raising measures should be taken to (re) define 9/12YBE**
- **Prepare an approximate budget to help families anticipate school-related costs**
- **Revisit the purpose, structure, and implementation of PTA contributions**
- **Develop national guidelines around coaching**
- **Further examine how 9/12YBE schools are understood by local communities**
- **Develop programming and policy to target children not currently in school**
- **MINEDUC and development partners must pursue evaluation strategies that account for the perspectives of children**

# POLICY CONTEXT:

## CHILDREN'S BASIC EDUCATION IN RWANDA

Rwanda's approach to basic education must be understood within its broader approach to social and economic development. This approach is outlined in a strategic document called Vision 2020 (Government of Rwanda [GoR] 2000). Vision 2020 describes the process through which Rwanda aims to become a middle-income country by the year 2020, an approach which places particular emphasis on macroeconomic stability, wealth creation, and transformation from an agrarian- to knowledge-based economy. Explicit reference is made to the importance of basic education for all as part of its broader aim toward the development of a skilled labor force, including the development of human resources through improving literacy, promoting gender equality, providing training in science and technology, and strengthening social cohesion (GoR 2000, 2002). This emphasis is closely mirrored within the mission of the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC) to "transform the Rwandan citizen into skilled human capital for socioeconomic development ... by ensuring equitable access to quality education focusing on combating illiteracy, promotion of science and technology, critical thinking and positive values" (GoR 2010, 1).

Vision 2020 guides MINEDUC's approach to children's basic education as detailed in the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (GoR 2010). This document describes the structure of the schooling system for children, including its focus on expanding access through its Nine Years Basic Education (9YBE) program. Currently, 9YBE includes six years of primary schooling and three years of lower secondary schooling (GoR 2010). Secondary school is divided into two levels over six years. The first three years (lower secondary) consist of general studies for all students. The latter three years (upper secondary) seek to integrate academics into vocational options (GoR 2010). Starting in 2012, the GoR has begun to expand its system of access to eventually include twelve years (i.e. 12YBE).

There remains some confusion about whether children's schooling in Rwanda is free. Law No 54/2011 of 14/12/2011 suggests education is free and compulsory through primary six (Article 47). At the same time, the Integrated Child Rights Policy states that the Government will legislate for the right for every child in Rwanda to have the first *nine* years of basic education fee-free (paragraph 4.3.1). Adding to this disconnect is the way that children's education has come to be publicly understood. For example, consider recent

articles in one of Rwanda's leading newspapers: "Rwandan children are offered free and compulsory education which consists of six years of primary education and the first three years of secondary school" (New Times, 30 Aug 2012); and "[Rwanda] has been able to put all children of school going age in school and they are guaranteed to stay in class until they finish the nine years of basic education" (New Times, 03 Dec 2012). In short, Rwandan law clearly explains that children are entitled to six years of primary education. However, there appears to be some lack of harmonization between what this law stipulates, the policies it has come to produce, and the way that education has come to be publicly understood.

School costs are currently structured in the following way. First, the Ministry of Finance (MINECOFIN) administers funds directly to head teachers. This includes 3,500 rwf (5.60 USD) per annum per pupil funded through the capitation grant. According to Transparency International (2012), resources are administered through the following mechanism: the schools report their number of pupils to the district-level officers. The district then informs MINEDUC who in turn requests this amount of money (i.e. # students x 3,500 rwf) from the Ministry of Finance. For boarding schools, the per-student amount is 21,000 rwf per year.[1]

This amount is then transferred directly to the account of each school. Schools have some flexibility in how the capitation grant is used, but in general 50 percent of this amount is intended to provide school materials such as books, 35 percent is for school repairs or construction, and 15 percent goes toward strengthening capacity of teachers (IPAR 2012; Transparency International 2012). [2] Teachers are paid through a parallel process based on district-level monitoring. Primary school salaries total 45,000 rwf per month.[3]

An additional resource for schools comes through PTA contributions.[4] Through the Parent Teacher Committee (PTC) and through General Assembly of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), an additional amount of funds is established to supplement teacher salaries (MINEDUC 2009). PTA contributions hold the seemingly competing characteristics of being both *agreed upon* by parents at each school while also technically remaining a *voluntary*

1 This information comes from an internal MINEDUC document dated 12 August 2012.
2 The Rwanda-based Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) recently published the report: 'School Funding and Equity in Rwanda' (IPAR 2012). It contains a detailed explanation of the Government of Rwanda's current expenditures toward basic education. See also World Bank (2011).
3 This figure is scheduled to significantly increase for FY 2012/13 with teachers receiving incrementally higher levels of pay commensurate with experience and qualifications.
4 Throughout the text, we use 'PTA' as shorthand to refer to PTA contributions. This reflects the language used by most of our study participants. However, we are aware that in other regions of Rwanda, PTA may be more commonly known as 'teacher's bonus' or by its French equivalent 'Prime Des Enseignants'

contribution given Rwanda's fee-free basic education system (IPAR 2012; MINEDUC 2009). PTA amounts have been found to differ substantially by geographic location: thus, schools comprised of children from poorer settings may pay less for PTA compared with schools in wealthier areas (IPAR 2012; VSO Rwanda 2003) Rwanda. There is evidence to suggest that teachers may be attracted to those schools able to pay higher PTA contributions (ibid.).

Access to schooling for both girls and boys has never been at higher levels. In 2011, net enrolment stood at 96 percent (MINEDUC 2012). Girls' enrolment in primary and lower secondary schooling is currently slightly higher than that of boys (ibid.). These figures point to Rwanda's progress toward universal primary education and gender equity. Yet, there is evidence to suggest that costs associated with schooling remain a major obstacle for children, particularly those from low income families (World Bank 2011). It is our hope that this report will help to illuminate this issue.

Before doing so, we first turn our attention to how children's schooling has come to be understood on a global level, including the recent emphasis placed on ensuring access to basic education for all children. We review lessons learned from several different African contexts that have sought to reduce school costs as a way to scale up access.

# SCHOOL COSTS:

# A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Children's basic education through formal schooling has been enshrined as a social good, a basic right, and a pathway for the development of individuals, societies, and nation-states. Many children and families have come to view the opportunity to attend school as a ticket to a better life. However, this ticket often remains far from free. Universal enrolment and completion continue to remain elusive even in settings where concerted efforts have been made to remove structural barriers (e.g. school fees) thought to impede enrolment.

## The global endeavor to promote free, universal access to basic education

The idea of universal access to basic education for all children is not new. It was first formally recognized as a basic right in 1948 through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 26 states: *'Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory.'* This declaration has been repeatedly affirmed through subsequent global human rights treaties, including UNESCO's (1960) International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (United Nations 1976), and the United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child. Collectively, these treaties oblige ratifying members to the following concessions: (1) make primary education compulsory for all children; (2) develop measures to make secondary education accessible to all children; (3) ensure equitable access to higher education; and (4) provide remedial education for those individuals who have not yet completed primary education (UNICEF 2007, 7).

While there has been little opposition to the principle of basic education as a right, economic and political conditions have often failed to ensure access, particularly for the poorest children in a society. In the 1960s many newly-independent states enacted policies promoting free basic education. Such policies were considered essential in order to develop the capacity to foster sustainable economic growth (UNICEF and World Bank 2009). During this time, gross-enrolment rates reached as high as 80 percent in sub-Saharan Africa. However, in the 1980s states had to contend with expanding educa-

tion systems alongside faltering economies. Structural adjustment programs served to usher in measures of austerity that disproportionately impacted the poor. Rather than raise taxes to generate new revenue, states were encouraged to institute user costs for basic services such as school-based education. Demand for schooling subsequently decreased, and enrolment rates stagnated or declined (Cornea, Jolly, and Stewart 1987). By 1992 school enrolment within sub-Saharan Africa had dropped to 72 percent, and it was not until the year 2000 that attendance reached the rate it had been twenty years prior (Fredriksen 2009).

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All held in Thailand witnessed a renewed commitment toward universalizing education for all, including the elimination of user costs. Ten years later the World Education Forum held in Senegal produced the Dakar Framework for Action. Goal 2 of the framework is to provide free and compulsory primary education for all by the year 2015. This goal corresponds directly with Goal 2 of the UN Millennium Development Goals, which also states that by the year 2015, 'Children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.'

## Reducing school costs in other African settings

In recent years, a growing number a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa have taken significant steps to reduce costs that impede access. Several examples are included within the report 'Abolishing School Fees in Africa' (UNICEF and World Bank 2009). The report consists of case studies from five different African countries—Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi and Mozambique—that have sought to abolish school fees. In each setting, reductions in school fees achieved its intended effect: dramatic increases were reported in school enrolment.

The elimination of user fees was one aspect of broader educational reforms taking place—occurring alongside, for example, decentralization of educational management. In most countries, capitation grant systems were set up to replace fees. The per capita amounts allocated annually varied substantially. In Kenya 14 USD per student was allocated annually, while in Ghana it was 2.70 USD for boys and 3.88 USD for girls. In Ethiopia grants fluctuated depending on the school year: 1.20 USD was allocated for grades 1 through 4 but increased in subsequent grades. In addition to the financial resources allocated by the state, countries relied on additional sources of funding. Voluntary contributions from parents and communities were encouraged, and all continued to receive significant levels of external donor support.

To be sure, the formal elimination of school fees presented concurrent challenges for education systems. The enrolment surge was often accompanied by a noticeable drop in overall school quality. More students did not necessary result in education systems hiring commensurate numbers of qualified teachers; thus larger class sizes became increasingly common. Moreover, the progressive policies still failed to result in universal primary enrolment. Traditionally marginalized groups such as girls, the disabled, and the very poor continued to be disproportionately under-represented within schools.

# AT WHAT COST?

The discussion above is particularly focused on state efforts to remove formal school fees as a mechanism to increase access. School fees can be considered a *direct* school cost—other examples of direct costs might include school supplies, uniforms, parent teacher association contributions, exam fees, school maintenance or repairs, and afterschool coaching (IPAR 2012; Tomasevski 2003; Kattan and Burnett 2004). In other words, even in settings where school fees have officially been eliminated, children and families may be asked or required to directly finance their education in different ways. Thus, in their seminal report on user fees in primary education, Kattan and Burnett (2004) conclude that fee abolition is an important—but insufficient—step for states to ensure universal access by 2015.

Indirect costs may also impact children's experience of school (IPAR 2012; Kattan and Burnett 2004). School uniforms or PTA may be able to be anticipated; yet, indirect costs, such as opportunity costs, may vary from household to household. Opportunity costs can include situations where families must grapple to find the pathway between the promised benefits of attending school versus engaging in other activities, such as work or early marriage, to support themselves and/or their families (Boyden 1997; Hart 2008). In many rural settings, children may walk several miles to school each day (Punch 2004), representing a 'cost' of time not being used performing household duties—or making revisions to their lessons, for that matter.

Indirect costs may also present themselves in the form of economic shocks such as climactic conditions, health problems and family sizes, the ramifications of which may make it incredibly difficult to pay education-related costs or attend school (Watkins, Watt, and Buston 2001). In Tanzania, for example, researchers at Oxfam found school attendance was directly linked to fluctuations in the market economy: when coffee prices dropped, so did school attendance. In Ghana, when drought reduced agricultural production,

by extension it also dried up additional resources available to families to cover school-related costs (Ibid.).

In short, we can say that school costs can impact children's lives, livelihoods and overall educational experience in numerous ways—even in settings where school fees have been reduced or eliminated. It is in this spirit that we come to think about the question that has guided the idea behind this report. By asking, "At what cost?" we sought to allow study participants take a lead in identifying and explaining how costs come to operate within their lives.

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

This study was guided by the following question: *'In light of MINEDUC's current education policy of fee-free schooling, what costs do young people continue to incur, and to what extent might these costs impact upon children's educational experience?'*

For the purpose of this study we interpret the cost of schooling as those direct and indirect expenses incurred by families.[5] To be sure, we explore the impact of direct costs such as PTA and school uniforms. However, we also explore the indirect costs for children and families that our participants themselves associated with schooling. For instance, a girl's two-hour walk to school might represent a 'cost' to her or her family on myriad levels such as: (1) time not being used for completing her homework; (2) time not making contributions to household responsibilities such as cooking or looking after cows; and (3) the safety risk the girl must undertake on her long walk each day. This study sought to illuminate how young people and community members come to think about such 'costs' in relation to their schooling experience.

5 Taken from IPAR's (2012) conceptualization of three different blocks of funding for education in Rwanda.

We refer to children's schooling experience as a proxy of our intent to explore the impact of cost in a holistic sense. How costs affected access and retention were of high importance, but we were also open to learning how costs may affect children in other ways such as performance and completion. For example, we sought to explore the following types of questions: How might children who fail to pay the required costs be treated differently at school compared with their peers who paid? Do costs differ by gender? What is the situation facing school-age children who are not currently attending school?

Study findings are intended to strengthen an evidence-based approach within the education sector through two interrelated objectives. First, findings are intended to assist members of RENCP and other organizations who work within the education sector to strengthen their education-related programming and advocacy. For instance, through greater recognition of the scope of costs incurred in relation to schooling, stakeholders will be able to anticipate with greater precision the full range of expenses that must be considered when supporting children's education in Rwanda. Second, RENCP intends to use this study in its ongoing advocacy and collaboration with MINEDUC. We hope that the study will identify some of the structural barriers that continue to prevent Rwanda's education-related goals from being fully realized.

## STUDY METHODS

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The nature of our inquiry required a research design that privileges the perspectives and insights of children. To this end, our study sought to reflect two important principles about childhood. First, we sought to privilege the voices and experience of children—the assumption being children are social agents capable of producing valid data about their own experience (Prout and James 1997). In other words, it is not adequate to simply ask members of civil society, school administration, or local government about children's lives and experiences; children must be consulted themselves. This strong emphasis on children's views reflects Rwanda's National Integrated Child Rights Policy and its aim "to ensure that children are informed and consulted in the development of policies and programs in all matters that affect their lives" (MIGEPROF 2011, 23).

At the same time, however, we also recognize that children's voices are insufficient by themselves. Children may demonstrate limitations, for example, in their awareness about some of the costs and/or sources of support (e.g. school capitation grants) that come to impact upon their own educational experience. The approach adopted for this study sought to reflect these important perspectives.

## Social science case study

To address our research question, we adopted a social case study design. A case study is used to develop a more nuanced understanding of a particular "contemporary phenomenon" in-depth and within its real-life context (Yin 2002). In this case, the contemporary phenomenon in focus is children's experience of Rwanda's education system. The strength of a case study approach is not necessarily its ability to generalize specific findings to a broader population (Ibid.). Indeed, it would be inappropriate to suggest that the situation facing young people in the rural setting we studied will be the same as for young people in schools in Kigali, where costs, contributions, and livelihoods will vary considerably (see IPAR 2012). While we have no intention of judging a whole by a sliver, the strength of the case study design is in the details: by seeking out perspectives from numerous stakeholders in education, we begin to see how these different perspectives converge—or diverge—in a way that other approaches may not otherwise permit.

In this way, we hope that such an in-depth perspective will yield a level of depth about 'what is really going on', albeit in a limited geographic location,

with the intention that the lessons learned from this case study can serve as a catalyst for meaningful discussions in the arenas of policy and advocacy about how Rwanda's current basic education policy operates within the lives of children. It is our hope that this process can help Rwanda's education-related goals become more fully realized.

## Unit of analysis: Kiziguro Sector

The case study took place in Kiziguro Sector located in Gatsibo District in Rwanda's Eastern Province. The sector has a total population of approximately 30,000 people. Part of the sector lies directly on the main road connecting Kayonza to Nyagatare. Ready access to electricity and water in schools and homes is slowly improving but remains limited. Most residents continue to rely on different forms of agriculture for their livelihoods. In this setting, children function as an integral part of the reproduction of daily life through fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking, looking after cows, or digging in the fields. At the center of the village is a large Catholic parish which maintains historic ties with many of the schools nearby.

In the sector are seven government schools, including: four primary schools (Primary 1 through Primary 6); two 12YBE schools (Primary 1 through Senior 3 or Senior 4)[6]; and one high school (Senior 1 through Senior 6). Overall, the catchment area of the schools draws from children from within the sector, though the two 12YBE schools draw some of their student population from neighboring sectors as well. As a 'school of excellence' and boarding school, the high school consists of students from across the country.

### Pilot work and preparation

Our study design benefited considerably from the research coordinator who had been living and studying in Kiziguro for six months prior to the commencement of the current study. This localized knowledge helped to inform our approach, both in terms of methods and logistics. Different questions, concepts and approaches were informally explored and discussed within the community. During this preparatory phase, we found young people were willing to speak at length—and passionately—about the issue of school-related costs, and our ultimate study design reflects this. Our methods were also designed in such a way that recognizes the diverse nature of the educational experience of children in government-supported educational institutions. Factors such as gender or 'school type' (e.g. boarding vs. day school) may impact the nature and type of school-related costs incurred by children and

6 Technically one school is still 9YBE and the other 12YBE; however we attach '12YBE' to quotations from both schools to preserve anonymity

their families.

## Study team

Our study team was comprised of six Rwandan co-researchers and one expatriate research coordinator. Each member of the field team had previous experience conducting qualitative research. In addition to the coordinator, two members of the team had prior experience undertaking research in Kiziguro Sector. Research team members worked in pairs to facilitate focus groups. One facilitator led the discussion, with the other assistant making sure the interview remained private while also taking notes as appropriate.

## Sources of data

From our preparatory work, we found that simply asking participants to list the types of costs they pay at school would yield the usual suspects: books, pens, uniforms, and PTA-related contributions. Indeed, study findings do go into a lot of detail about these expenses. However, we began each focus group or interview by simply requesting participants to reflect upon how they have come to see the situation of children in their school or community. Using a series of follow-up questions we were ultimately able to explore how participants understood the issue of school costs and its inter-relationship with other aspects of children's lived experiences. When factors related to school costs or contributions were raised, our team sought to explore these in further detail using non-leading probes such as "Tell me more about this issue that you mentioned." Other times, we used what respondents offered us to further explore different dimensions or dynamics of this issue such as "How might this problem you mentioned differ by gender?" or "How does this problem differ between children who go to school compared with those who don't go to school?"

Our fieldwork in Kiziguro Sector yielded over 65 focus groups and interviews with approximately 200 participants. This included a wide range of education stakeholders in the area:

- *15 key informant interviews with local leaders and members of civil society.* We drew upon the knowledge and expertise of local leaders, along with members of local and international NGOs working in the area, who could speak knowledgeably about the situation of children and schooling in the sector. We also undertook a small number of interviews with members of organizations working outside the sector but who had experience with the issue of school costs.

- *8 key informant interviews with school administrators and education officers.* Semi-structured interviews were held with local school administrators, along with the local education officers. "School administrator" was defined as either the school head teacher or another administrator (e.g. director of studies) who could speak knowledgably about the issue of costing at his or her respective school. Interview participants were asked about the financial situation facing students at school, including the types of costs expected to be absorbed by students and families, the impact of capitation grants, and other sources of support. The second half of each interview focused on personal views on the situation facing students, including recommendations for how the situation could be improved.

- *18 focus groups with schoolchildren.* We conducted 18 focus groups (half female) with a total of 126 young people currently attending government-supported schools within the sector. We held at least two groups with children at each school. Groups were mostly comprised of children at the upper end of the education cycle (e.g. Primary 6 students for primary school; Senior 3 students for O-level, Senior 6 for high school). This was done for two reasons. First, we thought that students nearing completion of their studies may be able to offer a more complete reflection of the costs incurred over the duration of their school experience. Second, preliminary work during the piloting phases suggested that there were additional costs affecting children entering their final year of a particular schooling cycle, and it was important that these costs were reflected in our study findings.[7]

- *6 focus groups with parents.* We held six focus groups (half female) with parents across three different cells with a total of 42 participants. These groups averaged 82 minutes in length and offered particular insight into the interrelationship between challenges faced at home and the school.

- *16 interviews with school-age children not regularly attending school.* Of the young people we interviewed, 9 were female, and all but 3 were un-

7 We also recognize that focus groups with schoolchildren privilege the voices of those young people in which Rwanda's education policy has presumably worked 'well enough' for. In other words, the structural challenges that children discussed with us, however severe, were not so great so as to prevent the participants from attending school the day we spoke with them. To address this limitation, in addition to speaking with children no longer in school, we note that while focus groups did provide an opportunity for young people to discuss their individual experience with costs, the major focus of the group discussions was to learn from children's school- and community-based observations and insights.

der the age of 18. The parents or caregivers of seven of these young people were also interviewed. We identified these young people by working closely with local leaders.[8] Interviews were semi-structured and focused on children's (or caregiver's) prior engagement with formal schooling as well as the factors that led them to their current situation of not attending school. Interviews also explored children's future aspirations and challenges they anticipate.

## Ethics

The research coordinator worked closely with Plan Rwanda staff and administrators to develop the general study design. Given Plan's presence in the area as a service provider, it also served as our local referral organization.[9] Before the commencement of an interview or focus group, the facilitator detailed the purpose of the study, reviewed issues of privacy and confidentiality, and the right of participants to fully withdraw from the study at any time. The facilitator explained the purpose of the research was to help out Plan Rwanda and its associated NGOs get a better understanding of ongoing challenges around education, particularly as it related to school costs. The ultimate intention was to better ensure that local perspectives could be reflected in advocacy, policy and programming for children's education.

Our team was particularly preoccupied with ensuring that our potential study participants were fully informed about the study for two key reasons. First, participants had a right to know exactly how and what the study would be used for before agreeing to participate. Second, and on a related note, we were confident that participants would be more likely to speak freely and openly with us if they could be assured that their responses would remain private. It was also important for them to know that while we were providing a service of research for Plan Rwanda, we were not direct service providers.

At the end of each group or interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions to the study team. Sometimes this process took an additional 20 or 30 minutes as participants, particularly children and parents, expressed hope that their views would ultimately result in substantive changes on the programming and policy level. By and large, study participants left interviews satisfied that their views were sufficiently heard. Similarly, study

8 At the beginning of our fieldwork, we were told by one local official that we would have difficulty locating any out-of-school children; however, after 7 days of fieldwork, we had interviewed the 16 youth for this study. This was largely enabled through referrals from executive secretaries at the cell level.
9 Over the course of our fieldwork, we made one referral that received immediate follow-up from Plan's Child Protection Officer.

team members left interviews and groups feeling confident in the validity of the data generated.

# FINDINGS

Collectively, study participants painted a complex picture around school costs and their inter-relationship with school, family, and community life. For the purposes of this report, we have organized study findings around four sub-questions which helped to guide our analysis:

1. What are the school-related costs incurred as reported by children and parents?
2. In what ways might school costs come to affect children's educational experience?
3. How do school costs impact upon family and community life?
4. How are children's education-related requirements supported?

## 1. What are the school-related costs incurred as reported by children and parents?

Findings in this section draw primarily from focus groups with schoolchildren and adults as well as interviews with children not currently in school. An interactive costing activity was undertaken during focus groups with schoolchildren and adults. During the group, one facilitator used an oversized piece of drawing paper which focus group participants used to collectively develop an exhaustive list of the different costs that they associated with going to school. Participants were specifically asked to identify (1) the name of the cost and its amount; (2) how often this cost is asked of them; and (3) what happens if the cost is not paid. It was left up to participants themselves to determine what, in their view, constituted a school-related cost.

Tables 1 through Table 3 in Appendix 1 provide costs reported in focus groups for Primary, 12YBE, and High School, respectively. The costs listed in the tables are those that emerged in at least half of the focus groups. From these two tables, two things appear to be particularly striking. The first is the sheer

number of costs that must be paid in order to attend school. The second is the number of costs in which children reported being sent home from school when they failed to pay. The following section describes several of the costs that were most pronounced in the data.

## PTA contributions

PTA contributions featured centrally in all focus group discussions with parents and children.[10] For the study overall, there was a high level of awareness from the community about the presence of PTA contributions. Amounts varied depending mostly on school level. Primary schools requested between 200-300 rwf per term, while for 12YBE, it was 2000 rwf per term. PTA was characterized as a teacher's bonus. Head teachers and parents in particular emphasized the importance of this amount to help supplement teacher salaries.

In our interviews with head teachers, it was stressed how the PTA amount is arrived through a local and organic process. As a 12YBE head teacher put it: *'This is decided in the meeting of [the Parent Teacher Association] where we call all parents and it is upon them to decide on the cost.'*

Most interviews with head teachers stressed the importance of PTA for their schools. Other than capitation grant, PTA was characterized as an important source of resources that benefit the teachers. They equally stressed the voluntary nature of the contribution.

*'This money cannot prevent the child to attend school,'* noted a head teacher at a primary school. While the head teachers stressed the collective way in which the PTA was arrived on, they gave several examples that seemed to imply that the system was not working at their school as they might have hoped. One primary school head teacher estimated that only one-third of students at his school had made the contributions expected of them.

Earlier this year, one of our study team members had the opportunity to attend a PTA meeting for a school where the present study was later undertaken. During this meeting, the head teacher implored the parents to make their PTA contributions. Asked about this PTA meeting during the formal interview, the head teacher responded that the parents *'were not adhering to the payment as agreed.'* At the same time, head teachers placed particular stress on the voluntary nature of the contribution:

10 The exception to this was PTA at the high school (boarding school) level, because it is included as part of students' overall fee.

> '*In our constitution, there is free education … unless some parents agree to offer a teacher bonus this cannot stop the child to come to school. If the child does not pay we will call the parent and we can advise the parent. The PTA is about 2000 per term and 200 for primary per term but this money cannot prevent the child to attend school. We have to write a letter to her parent, so then we can advise.' (Head teacher, 12YBE)*

> '*[PTA] is not prohibiting learners, but it is a challenge to the school … when [parents] say they are going to pay 500 per term as PTA, it ends with the discussion. The parents do not honor the idea. The parents do not pay as they promise. A few pay, but most will not pay. However, for the orphans and the very poor, we do not ask for this kind of cost.' (Head teacher, 12YBE)*

Throughout interviews with most head teachers, the issue of PTA presented itself as a significant source of concern. The quotes suggest a degree of consternation on the part of head teachers with regard to the PTA contributions, as they are agreed upon but also technically voluntary. On one hand, head teachers stressed the importance of this contribution to supplement teacher salaries. On the other hand, procuring the agreed-upon amount from children or their families was a difficult and often unsuccessful task. This dynamic seems to put head teachers in the particularly awkward position of running a fee-free school while also continually chasing down children and parents for PTA funds. A member of a community-based NGO (and graduate of Rwanda's education system) put it this way:

> *'It is so confusing. People are like 'You have to take your kids to school.' At school, though, you have to pay a school contribution. But on the other hand the government says education policy is free. They do not know what is happening in the field. If you asked the Minister of Education, he would say, 'Schooling is free, education is free,' but when they come at school to visit, the [head teacher] will say education is free, because they are government leaders who will want to know whether the children are paying.'*

Interviews and focus groups with children and other adults in the community provided a very different characterization of the nature of PTA contributions. This is well-illustrated in an exchange that occurred within one of the focus groups with women: Commenting on PTA contributions, a 38 year-old woman and community leader started off the conversation by saying, *'There is*

*no child that is sent away because they have not paid PTA'*—at which point she was immediately interrupted and chastised by other members (parents) of the group: *'Ah! They send them away! They send them away!' 'Okay,'* the woman replied, *'maybe I can say that they don't send them away but they deny them to attend lessons.'*

It was in our discussions with children that particularly vivid illustrations were provided for how PTA is understood within their respective school and community. Indeed, all 16 focus groups with children in primary and 12YBE schools raised the issue of the involuntary nature of PTA in their school. This issue emerged without prompting from the focus group facilitators. The following quotes from children help to explain children's engagement with this issue:

> *'Even tomorrow they will send them home because we have the last test and they cannot have you sit for the test before paying this PTA.'* (Girl, 16, P6)

> *'There are many students who repeat a year just because of PTA. For instance, they come today. Then when you start doing your exam, they send you out. Then, tomorrow they come back, then they send you out. After tomorrow, they do the same. Then at the end, after making a total marks on your academic report, you find that you have failed just because you missed some exams. Then, they make you repeat year saying that you don't have enough marks and you cannot complain. Then, that student who is asked to repeat the year when he knows that it is not because he is not intelligent, he gets discouraged, he feels like he is wasting his time and he decide to leave the school and look for other things to do.' (Boy, 19, S3, 12YBE)*

Children not currently in school, along with their parents, drew from their own experience[11] and observations to offer insight into the issue of PTA:

> *'[My best memory of school was the] good education that we received. I stopped going to school but it is not school's fault. It was due to my lacking financial capacity ... it was not possible to find all school materials required ... I was not able to pay all of the fees required each term. [Fees were] 500 Rwf per term and then there were notebooks. We were really required to bring many materials so I was not able to find them. That is why I dropped out of school.' (Girl, 17, left school*

11 For the 17 young people we interviewed, the median response to 'highest year of school completed' was Primary 5.

*after P5)*

*'When a child doesn't get that [PTA] money, he or she gets expelled from school. The school can be patient for one month but when it goes beyond they send the child at home. They tell you 'go home and come back with the money.' ... The school can be patient for one month but when it goes beyond they send the child at home and tell you 'go home and come back when you have the money.' ... I don't think if there is a parent who doesn't wish his or her child to be in school. But when they fail to get the means, that is when a child drops out of the school.' (Mother whose child dropped out of school)*

By law, children are not to be excluded from the school due to school fees, which were officially banned from basic education beginning in 2003. However, children and families seemed to talk about the function of PTA in much the same way one might talk about a fee. As the mother's quote above indicates, schools did not seem to have a formal, written procedure for those failing to pay PTA costs; however, prolonged failure to pay often had the same end result: exclusion.

## Exam-related costs

In some of our preparatory work, we visited a 12YBE school during a mock exam. There were about three students looking very unhappy sitting outside the office for the Director of Studies while the exam was underway. When we asked the students what the issue was, a girl told us that she and her colleagues had failed to pay the 1000 rwf fee for the exam that day, so they were being sent home.

The selected quotes in the section above illustrate the untoward connection between payment of PTA and children's ability to attend school. Several of the quotes specifically make the link between children's ability to sit for exams and PTA payment. However, many children also spoke of other more direct costs associated with examinations.[12] Below are some of the examination-specific costs abstracted from the tables located in the Appendix:

1. Accommodation and food during national exams: 5000 rwf (Senior 3, 12YBE)

2. District examination: 1000 rwf (Senior 3, 12YBE)

12 This strong emphasis on examination fees was likely due to our study's emphasis on speaking with 'candidates' at the end of their schooling cycle (i.e. P6, S3, and S6).

3. Examination book: 300 rwf (Senior 3, 12YBE)
4. Passport photos for national exam: 500 rwf (Primary 6; Senior 3, 12YBE)
5. School report: 100-300 rwf (Primary 6; Senior 3/4, 12YBE)
6. Mock examinations: 500-2000 rwf (Primary 6; Senior 3, 12YBE)
7. National exam registration fee: 3000 rwf (Senior 3, 12YBE)

The following quotes from schoolchildren described the implications of failing to pay examination-related costs:

*'In the first term, we pay 2000 rwf for PTA. Then the second term they are asked to pay 3000 for registration for the national examination, then they pay another 2000 for PTA [in the second term]. Then we pay 500 for photos. Then we pay 1000 for mock examination for Senior 3 students. Then you add 5000 for the food and accommodation during the national examination ... For a child from the poor family, that is a very big amount to pay. There was a child that was in our class. He left the school to work for that money. But he paid only 3000 for registration for national examination and wasn't able to pay the other money. So he just stayed home.' (Boy, 17, S3, 12YBE)*

*'When you didn't pay [the examination fee] they don't allow you to sit for this exam. So you miss the exam.' (Boy, 16, P6)*

*'We don't understand this payment for a notebook for exams because when we come here at the beginning we already paid 3000 for a ream of paper and the authorities explained that the paper is for use during the exams. So we don't understand what all those reams are doing – just sitting in the offices?' (Girl, 17, S3, 12YBE)*

The quotes above describe expenses associated with local and national-level examinations for candidates at the Primary 6 and Senior 3 level. The ways in which children talk about the financial challenges related to examination costs suggests a clear possibility that examination-costs may explain, at least in part, problems of retention in school.

## School materials

Most groups and interviews also described the struggles some children have in securing basic school materials, most notably school uniforms, notebooks, and pens. To this set of expenses, we also add haircut, shoes, and (for girls)

sanitary pads, because these expenses were widely viewed as essential to attend primary or secondary school.

Below are some of the costs associated with these materials taken from the abstracted from the tables in the Appendix. Unless otherwise noted, the costs below apply to both Primary and 12YBE:

1. Haircut: 100-300 rwf per month
2. Mathematical set: 400-500 rwf (paid once)
3. Pens: 50-100 rwf; need red and blue; buy every two weeks
4. Sanitary pads (girl): 600-1200 rwf per month
5. School Uniform: 2600-4000 for one pair (Primary); 6000-9000 rwf (12YBE)
6. Shoes: 600-3000 rwf
7. Notebooks: 100-200 rwf; 20-30 books per year (Primary); 1500 rwf per book. S4 students needs about 6 books per year (12YBE)

The following quotes from schoolchildren attempting to illustrate the implications of failing to pay for these basic materials:

> *'At the first day of the school, the student must be clean, in a clean uniform, with good shoes and without hair on his head. When you make a total of this amount, it is very big. Then when if you go to dig, you will be paid only 500 rwf per day and it is also difficult to find where to dig for money. How will you find this amount of money? If they send the student back home, they will wait for a long time to get the money' (Male Parent, 47)*

> *'There are [children] who miss notebooks to write in, then they send them home. Or they miss a pen and they send them home. They miss school uniform – they send them home. And they tell them to come back to school once they have those materials.' (Boy, 16, P6)*

> *'Of course you may not have them and when you are in your period it leaves a mark behind on your clothes and when other children notice it you will definitely get embarrassed!' (Girl, 16, P6)*

*'It is so clear and excusable that on the first day you can explain to your teacher that your shoes were worn out and maybe you are preparing to buy another one more pair, but you can't keep pleading with the teacher on the same issue daily, so what a student does is to stay home until you get what you are required to bring.' (Girl, 16, P6)*

*'My uniform was stolen. At the same time I was expected to be in the garden [helping my family because my mother was sick]. I approached my teacher and asked him if I could come without school uniform, but he said it was impossible. So I didn't go back ... You would be beaten if you went without school uniform. I was beaten two times.' (Girl, 18, left school after P3)*

We wish to draw attention to the fact that the figures above are intended to present the range of costs that children and families must contend with in order to attend school (see also Appendix). The quotes help to remind us of the serious nature of these costs: that there are clear consequences for children who fail to arrive at school without the materials expected of them.

## Coaching

Coaching is included as a school cost in this analysis because it was brought up by so many children as a critical aspect of their schooling experience and considered an essential expense for educational success. Coaching was reported to occur before and/or after school and also during the holidays, such as in the weeks separating the second and third term. The strong emphasis on coaching across the focus groups seems to underscore children's commitment to educational attainment. To the best of our understanding, coaching is not an official aspect within the government's education system. How our respondents came to talk about coaching, including costs, tended to vary, but per-month figures tended to hover around 500 rwf[13] for primary school. Below are some examples that describe how coaching was talked about during focus group discussions:

*'You see, the teachers teach and after a month you have to pay this one thousand. Yet sometimes you don't have it because you are poor or at times your father does not like the idea of a child going to school, so when you ask him, he will tell you that when he was studying he did not have that coaching you are telling him about. So you*

13 One primary school stood as the exception to this figure where monthly costs were reported to be 5000 rwf.

*find that you will miss it and others will of course have to continue. Yet this coaching would help a weak child in class to catch up as well.'* (Girl, 15, P6)

*'We study in the evening when others go home. For us we take an hour of coaching because of this idea we shared with the teachers. And even our parent support us in this. Now we are ready for the national exam.' (Girl, 18, P6)*

*'Coaching is attended by only students from rich families, and those students are the ones then that succeed [in sitting for the national exam]. I can say that we are not the same students [compared with those who attend coaching]. We don't attend the same courses. For them, after school, they give them questions and they spend the night answering them. But for us [who do not attend], they don't give us those questions, saying that we didn't pay the coaching money. So you can understand that if we are not given homework to do during the night we will know nothing. So* this coaching is a problem for us. We want it for all of us.' (Boy, 14, P6)

It was clear that children placed high importance on coaching – particularly given that most of them were candidates preparing for their national examinations. However, we learned of a couple of instances where the idea behind coaching seems to have been misused. For example, a Primary 6 boys group described how only '*girls from rich families*' receive coaching at their school, and how such payments translated into favoritism in the classroom. Another boy, 14, from the same group put it this way: *'These new teachers they only corroborate with those who gives them money.'* Like paying PTA or coming to school with the school supplies expected of them, coaching seemed to function as another potential avenue where resources served as a key determinant of children's educational experience.

Finally, there was some confusion among members of our team—and apparently among the children, too—as to whether coaching is always an optional activity. A boy at another Primary 6 school stated:

*'I wonder to myself if after-school coaching is mandatory or if it a free choice for children. Why do they send home children who don't attend coaching when coaching is not mandatory? For example, in the holidays, when we have been attending coaching we might have a long journey for an appointment that we didn't plan for. Then*

*you don't attend that coaching. So when you come back they will hold you to explain to your parents to explain why you didn't attend coaching. And when you tell the parent to come to explain, then the parent says 'I didn't have any money to pay.' Then you have to explain to the teachers, and the teachers don't accept ... So some parents pay—others don't pay.'*

In another example, we learned from two children no longer in school who were recently excluded from the same primary school. In independent interviews, they told us that they were dismissed because they had failed to attend coaching during the holiday session. During our focus group discussion with boys from this same school, one commented that *'[The school] asks us to study and pay 900 rwf [for coaching during the holidays]. But the student who didn't come to study in the holidays is asked to pay 1500 rwf as punishment.'* We did not ask the head teacher directly about these instances, but during our interview he alluded to the pressure he felt for his students to succeed at exams: *'When a school has a good report, then the headmaster has a good report, too,'* he said.

## 2. How do school costs come to affect children's educational experience?

The evidence presented in the previous section suggests that school costs continue to play a major role in defining children's overall educational experience. While the section above identified explicit connections between these costs and children's ability to attend—and remain in—school, in this section we expand our inquiry to look at other ways in which children's educational experience was impacted by school costs.

### School costs and discouragement

Focus groups with children and adults pointed to students being sent home for failing to have the required materials (uniforms, notebooks, and pens) or for not paying school-related costs such as PTA. However, for those sent home numerous times, some children reported how they began to question the merits of continuing the struggle to remain in school, particularly if the issue remains unresolved and thus presents a strong likelihood of being sent back home to pay costs.

*'If you tell [school administrators] your problems, they tell you not to come back to school. Sometimes they say 'If you don't have finan-*

*cial capacity, why did you decide to come to school? Don't you have other works to do at home? Others who did are now developing themselves, but you, you are wasting your time here while you know that you have no financial capacity. So do what you are able to do.' Then the students get discouraged.' (Boy, 18, S5)*

*'So they made these [12YBE] schools as free schools to facilitate those poor children and other students to come to school. But if they miss PTA, they don't do examinations. They miss some examinations and then they don't pass into the next year. It is not because they are not intelligent but it is because they miss some examinations.' (Boy, 17, S3, 12YBE)*

Others spoke of the humiliation and embarrassment they felt for failing to have the proper materials or expenses asked of them by the school. Some reported additional punishments such as sweeping school grounds, digging, or cleaning toilets when they failed to bring the proper materials or costs requested of them to school.

A couple of participants implicated school costs to articulate a deeper, underlying psychosocial impact, a particular impact that seems to go strongly against the intended aims to MINEDUC's intentions of basic education: The poor student who misses class due to PTA is unable to study effectively because they have missed so much school—a process that serves as a regular reminder of their poverty. For example, a local leader took a member of our study team to meet 'Claire'[14] age 18, who is not currently in school. In our meeting with her, she reflected on the humiliation she felt for not having a uniform when she was a student:

*'I was sad to see the other children looking smart in their uniforms. I was ashamed [that I didn't have a uniform]. The teacher used to tell the student who didn't have a uniform to stand up and I was the first one to stand-up. I was ashamed among other students. I went to tell to my mother, but she said We are poor, I cannot do anything, let us wait, maybe we will get the money.'*

Claire went on to report that she never went back to school after Primary 3. She has since taken up an assortment of economic activities to support herself and to care for her chronically ill mother. During our interview with her she also worries about her younger brother who is in Primary 2. '*I think he*

14 All names are pseudonyms.

*will stop [school] too*,' she told us. '*We are poor and my mother is always sick. If [my younger brother] succeeds [national exams] we will not be able to pay school fees and school materials.*'

## Aspirations mediated by school costs

Claire's narrative above underscores another significant theme that emerged from the data: school costs and contributions not only impact how children come to understand their lives in the present (i.e. their ability to enroll and remain in school), but it also points to how school-related costs today may affect how children and families come to think about their educational futures. A child in Primary 6, for example, must contend with a range of costs that have been outlined above. However, if they are struggling at this stage in their schooling to pay their 200 rwf PTA contribution, the prospect of paying 2000 rwf PTA for 12YBE was daunting and perhaps unrealistic. In such a situation, future educational aspirations may shift downwards.

Perhaps given many of the focus groups and interviews we completed were with Primary 6 and Senior 3 candidates, many participants focused on their upcoming national examinations. Many seemed to suggest that even if they passed their national examinations, they would most likely end up with their colleagues who failed their exams because of an inability to pay for a 'school of excellence.' The following quotes offer examples of how school costs were situated in relation to how children thought about their educational futures:

*'Those that perform well [on senior 3 exams at a 12YBE school] maybe cannot afford to go to senior [a school of excellence] unless they are supported. So when all this fails, this child continue to join senior four in a school that is not good [12YBE] and that does not perform well; yet the child was brilliant so this also affects them.' (Female Parent, 33)*

*'I know children who have filled forms for the national exam and have never stepped into the school again. Giving reasons that they are very sure even if they passed the national exam, they wouldn't get money to take them to secondary so they only fill the form for the sake of it and they are now waiting to come and sit for their national exams but without studying.' (Girl, 16, P6)*

*'Most of the time you have the poor mentality of saying to yourself 'Even if I pass my national exam I will not proceed to Senior Level [boarding school].' This also affects children. They get discouraged because most of the time they could wish to go to higher standard senior schools because of poverty.*

*When they think of going to the poor ones, they say "Me I cannot go to Gahini, I can't go to Gasange"; they therefore set their minds like that and don't perform well.' (Girl, 16, P6)*

*'My request is that school can try to help those children who passes the national exam and pays them school fees [for boarding school]. We have seen many children who gets discouraged by that issue of thinking that there is no reason for putting much effort in their studies and since they know that will never go secondary school.' (Boy, 16, P6)*

*'I have a child that completed school but because I didn't have enough money to send her to a better school, I took her to [a 12YBE school]. This child has no father, I am her mother but I really don't have enough support for her. So she was saying that she did not like the school and that I should sell the land and at least send her to a better school. I had only 35000 rwf, so I didn't have all the requirements for her. I really didn't have enough. I remember that when I failed to give her what she needed, she started crying and I cried along with her and I regretted why I gave birth to her. What I am trying to say is that our children really go through a lot. I was fortunate that this child later got an NGO that supported her and she is now studying in Kigali.' (Female Parent, 40)*

Many of these quotes dwell on participants' understanding of 'boarding schools' or 'centers of excellence' being of higher quality than 12YBE schools. This issue of the perception of quality is not central to this study but might be worth exploring in greater detail in the future. The point directly relevant for the present study, however, is that children's aspirations (and that of their parents) seem to be adapted downward directly as a result of financial contributions they anticipate will be expected of them.

## Unpredictable costs makes it difficult for children and families to plan

Across focus groups and interviews there was a general confusion expressed over what school actually costs. While some costs, such as a school uniform or pens, may be fairly fixed or predictable, the concern was raised that the school costs are difficult to anticipate for families.

Both parents and children noted that because of the unpredictable nature of some of the costs, parents may raise suspicion of their children when they continue to ask for money for school. They may give funds for a while, but if money becomes tight they may later refuse.

*'So those are the challenges that we are always facing. And even when we have parents who accept to give you this amount of money [for PTA and other contributions], if you ask them about other money, they don't know [about it]. So [parents] will be discouraged, thinking that you are asking the money to use for unnecessary things. There is no specified money to pay every term or every year so that you can plan and say 'I will pay this amount of money for this term and I will pay that amount of money for another term.' If you know the amounts, you could even work for the amount in the holidays and save some money that you will be needing to pay during the school period.' (Boy, 19, S3, 12YBE)*

*'School is not free in Rwanda. There is that money for PTA which is the most serious problem to the parents and the children. The child comes home and tells the parent that if you don't give me PTA I will not go back to school any more ... So if school is free in Rwanda it should be free, and if not parents should know it.' (Male Parent, 41)*

Some NGOs found the unpredictability of costs to be a particular challenge for within their own work. For example, the variation of PTA from one year to the next—and even from one school to another—was characterized as a challenge for NGOs hoping to support children in school. Other non-PTA costs, such as examination fees, reams of paper, and other contributions pose challenges for effective advocacy. This may have affected the way organizations sought to support children in the community. On one hand, organizations may structure their budget to offer partial support (e.g. school uniforms) for children, but this support may prove limited if children are then unable to pay their PTA requirements. In other instances, organizations may aim to provide a comprehensive package of services and supplies to a limited cohort of children in the area—but resources could potentially be stretched further if there was a clearer understanding of the full range of costs families should be able to pay. One representative of an NGO had the following recommendation: *'For me I think that the government should come up with a fixed amount ... that will help the parent to plan for the next academic year. But with no fixed contribution, the schools will put what they want with inconsistence fees.'* The difficulty in anticipating costs may have also impacted the way that some NGOs sought to assist with children's education. This issue will be examined in greater detail later in this document.

## 3. How do school costs impact family and community life?

This study was particularly concerned with the issue of school-related costs and contributions. However, we also recognized that school-based education functions as an embedded institution within broader social, cultural, and economic processes. Our questions were sensitive to this dynamic. For instance, after asking about in- and out-of-school problems facing children in the area, we asked them to explore with us how these problems may be related to one another. Participants offered a great deal of depth on this issue. Below are several examples related to the study team.

### Poverty and the struggle for other additional costs for children

Most participants we spoke with were likely living in poverty. Many spoke openly with us about how poverty impacted their lives and engagement with school-based education. We also heard of the determination for children to remain in school. Take, for example, 'Clarisse,' a 17-year-old girl in Primary 6. She lives with 8 other siblings in a home that her family rents for 15000 rwf per year. Her family relies on subsistence agriculture to make ends meet. Clarisse's mother is a tireless worker, but her father is disabled and cannot help the family. They do not have health insurance and feel like there are few people in the community that can offer them assistance. The family struggles to pay PTA for all of their children. When we spoke with Clarisse's mother, she said that school uniforms were really a struggle for her family. The mother's solution:

> *'If you have two children who are approximately the same age, as they study into shifts, isn't it possible that one takes the uniform in the morning and the other puts it on the afternoon? ... The head teacher told me that if I really have that problem of not being able to buy uniforms for all the kids, I should go in to his office and expose my problem to them ... but I didn't go there. I am not good at begging.'*

Since this study considered the school as an embedded institution within a context of children's broader lives, by extension, our participants also described the costs of schooling as connected to other financial costs that families must address. The stress of these costs was seen as much more challenging for those families with many children.

*'Yes because the parents have no capacity. Then you find that the uniform gets old before the end of the year. If we can get a sponsor to pay for uniforms, we, as parents we can do our best to cover the other costs. For instance, a uniform costs 3000. When you have 5 children, you are asked to pay 15000. Then you will also pay the other 15000 for their health insurance.'*
*(Male Parent, 40)*

*'This year, I paid 2000 rwf for every student in secondary school. Then 1500 for health insurance. It is too much. I cannot even remember [all the costs]! I am always wondering why people don't end up stealing. It is very difficult.'*
*(Male Parent, 51)*

Sometimes the cascading level of costs turned out to be too much for children to continue in school. As an out of school girl, 18, told us: '*My father passed away, with my mother disabled, there was no scholastic materials available for me'*. She knew the situation would not get better, so she decided to give up school.

## Work and contributions to the family

When we explored how the challenges faced around schooling connect to other aspects of their lives, participants noted how children continue to play an integral role within their families. The decision to enroll a child in—or be removed from—school was often a tradeoff made from economic calculation. In the immediate sense, participants suggested that there are always 'costs' involved in children's schooling. Below are some examples of how this issue presented itself in the data:

> All children in the family must work to raise money in order to pay for the school. Depending on what they get from the garden – if they don't have money they go to dig with the children and they sell whatever they have to help contribute to go to school (summarized from female parent focus group)

Several of the children no longer in school reported to us that their parent(s) removed them from senior-level school for them to take care of their younger siblings. '*Sometimes I talk about it with my mother and she tells me that she did her best to take me there but she was not able*,' one young man, 23, told us. '*Sometimes when someone is telling me about my education, I cry.'*

Children often spoke in detail about many of their home based responsibilities. These included: caring for children, caring for livestock, digging for money to support the family, cooking, collecting grasses for cows, fetching

firewood, fetching water, and selling materials in small businesses. Fetching water was a task that came up with great frequency—in part because so many children are required to undertake this task, but also because it is such a time-intensive activity. Many children reported fetching water each morning before their walk to school. They may arrive to school late and/or fail to study well. While recognizing the importance of water for families, parents also recognized the challenge this poses of children:

> *'In this area we have no water near our homes. And when a child goes to fetch water far from home that is when you find them reaching at school late and their teachers send them back home because they were late. So this problem of water interrupts children's studies very much. Another problem is about the poverty that parents have, you find a child going to school when they have not eaten. You cannot imagine how a child can attend the class when they have nothing in the stomach.'* (Male Parent, 40)

Some children reflected how cows seem to preoccupy a majority of their non-school activities. While most were very pleased to have cows, they also noted that unlike the past, cows today are kept in a fence. The responsibility often fell on children, then, to collect food (grasses) and water to maintain the cow. Some interviews and focus groups seemed to imply that given this preoccupation for caring for cows, some families (but not all) retained more faith in the potential economic benefits of the cow to the viability of families than the economic benefits of keeping their children in school.

Some children expressed that they feel they are in a difficult position in balancing school and home responsibilities. On one hand, teachers implore their pupils to make revisions and complete homework during their evening hours. On the other hand, parents require their children to undertake a number of essential works.

> *'When I arrive at home [from school] I take a small break. When I take my notebooks to revise my parents ask me 'didn't you already attend class at school?' and then they give me housework and when you finish your housework at night they will not allow you to use paraffin to study. They tell us that we have already done a lot at school and that we have to work when we are at home.'* (Girl, 18, S3, 12YBE)

Many homes do not yet have electricity; yet, when children ask money from their parents to buy paraffin in order to make revisions, a common sentiment expressed by parents was to say that they should do school work at school and home works at home. Sometimes this was explained by children and

others as ignorance on the part of the parents who themselves often did not have the educational opportunities that their children do today. However, it was also the case that children were expected to make essential contributions to helping their families.[15]

## Challenges at home

While most focus groups and interviews talked about the general struggles facing children in the area around education and school costs, there seemed to be a general consensus across participants that orphans faced the most serious challenges.

> *'We have a child in our class. She is an orphan but most of the time she is absent at school. Even the whole last week she was not there. She was farming beans. She has a difficult life.'* (Girl, 18, S3, 12YBE)

> *'I am orphan, I live with my grandmother. From the first term up to now she bought only seven notebooks, so now I am using the notebooks that my colleagues are buying for me.'* (Girl, 16, P6)

> *'I am an orphan, I had been asking for support from S1 but I couldn't get the support. I have sold all my land in order to pay from S1 to S5. They finally accepted the support when I was in S5.'* (Boy, 21, S6)

> *'I'm an orphan. I lead a family. So it is not easy to lead a family and go to school at the same time. So if you lead a family, for example, we as candidates for national examination ... they are asking for us too much money to pay when we will be in the school when we will be taking the national examination. So if you are an orphan, you do everything yourself. So it is difficult to pay all the money. You can study during one term, then the other term, you don't go to school. So it is very difficult. It is a struggle.' (Boy, 18, S3, 12YBE)*

It was noted how many orphaned children stay with families who are not their parents. They were characterized as being given additional works. For a poor family struggling to pay school costs for their biological family, any orphans living with them are often subject to further marginalization.

Schoolchildren typically saw going to school as a fundamental part of who they are today and a vital requirement for who the type of people they hoped to become in the future. Particularly given the government's emphasis on education for all, Vision 2020, and the transformation to a knowledge-based

15 See Appendix 2 for a series of case studies that help to illuminate this issue.

economy, children's aspirations were shaped accordingly. This view often received the support of parents and other community members—but not always. Indeed, some children perceived parents as lacking commitment to their desire to be in school. To paraphrase the views of many children, parents or caregivers will tell them *'I didn't go to school and look at me. I'm alive. So what is the point of going to school?'* Parents who viewed schooling in this way tended to place lower priority on fulfilling school-related costs. For example, one focus group of girls discussed how parents will not buy school materials for their children at the beginning of the year; instead, they will wait until the children are sent home from school before buying the materials. A boy in another group offered the following example:

*'Our parents have a wrong understanding. Like you can ask your father to give you money for PTA. He refuses. He says 'No I have no money; that is too much ...' And at the end of the day you see him coming home drunk. So our parents should be taken into camps to learn about children's values and rights. Even when you come to school teachers sends you back to come with money. We have a problem of teachers and parents.' (Boy, 14, P6)*

Expressing understanding—or providing the required funds or materials—in line with children's wishes to attend school was not a given. Yet, this challenge must also be understood and explained within the other themes of this study including high levels of poverty, household responsibilities, and school-related costs.

## 4. How are children's education-related requirements supported?

It was clear that school costs proved to be a challenge for many children and families in Kiziguro. It also became clear that there were some sources of support for young people in the area including local government and members of civil society.

### Local government support

Local government leaders were seen as providing the function of identifying specific vulnerable children or families requiring different types of support. From what we understood in interviews and groups, local leaders were the ones charged with developing lists of the vulnerable within their catchment area; this list, in turn, would then be passed along to the sector. This list was seen as functioning in several ways. First, some head teachers and other of-

ficials noted that if a child was having difficulty paying their PTA, they would go to the sector office, and if they had been identified as being poor (i.e. their name was on the list), they would receive a letter excusing them of paying some of the school-related costs.[16] A second way this list functioned was to assist NGOs seeking to assist members of the local community. Beneficiaries could be identified from this list.[17]

Views tended to diverge as to the effectiveness of this list in identifying the poorest of the poor for assistance. As one male parent, 51, put it*: 'If you are a village leader and they ask you to do a list of poor children you write also your children or others from rich families, and then they don't check they think the list is right.'* At the same time, many others viewed this strategy as perhaps the most transparent way of operating to provide education-related supports within communities.

## Support from NGOs

During our fieldwork we were able to identify and speak with members of five NGOs actively engaged in the education sector and who had a regular presence in the area. In each case, we opted to meet with a local representative in the area, as we were less concerned about macro-level strategy than we were about how their work was operating on the ground. We found a number of these NGOs play a critical role for children's education, though their models of intervention tended to differ substantially.

Overall, study participants seemed to be grateful for the services that these organizations sought to provide. There was a lot of confusion, however, as to how different organizations seek to help children. For instance, some organizations focus their work on community-based initiatives while others opt for individual child sponsorships. Children and adults indicated that they were not always well-informed about why organizations operate in the ways they do. Some felt that their family has to be well-connected or 'in the know' in order for their children to receive support, an approach that would seem to

16 This is consistent with MINEDUC Law N° 29/2003 of 30/08/2003 cited earlier on in this report which is intended to support 'orphans and children from destitute families.' (Article 3)

17 We also were aware of the presence of a community development fund per discussion with the District Education Officer. Through none of our study participants mentioned this fund, the district reportedly receives approximately 3 million rwf from MINEDUC to support the most vulnerable children. These funds are then distributed within the 14 sectors comprising Gatsibo District. Each sector, then, identifies most vulnerable children to buy mostly scholastic materials and other support items. Other than the distribution of resources that occurs from the district to the sector, it was not clear whether there is a mechanism at the sector level for how supports are provided to children.

exclude some of the most marginalized in the community.

Some participants, particularly children, raised concerns that the types of worries children were having, particularly school costs, were not being attended to because 12YBE is supposed to be free. As one boy described:

> *'All the supporters left us because of this nine years basic education. They have heard that it is free and decided to stop supporting.'* (Boy, 13, P6)

Indeed, our interviews and focus groups identified few sources of support for children in 12YBE education schools. If there is any support given to education, it seems largely reserved for non-12YBE schools, such as boarding schools, that are still responsible for paying a significant amount of fees (see Table 3). Perhaps this inattention to the persisting school costs for children can be seen in an interview we conducted with an experienced member of an international NGO working in the area.

NGO respondent:

> *'You have to understand. Here in Rwanda, we have 12YBE and it is free. But it doesn't mean it is free 100 percent. The PTA is developed and intended to serve as a motivation for teachers. It is not good for schooling in Rwanda to be 100 percent free. It is good to have parents participate and make contributions to the association. In public schools education is free.'*

Interviewer:

> *'In our study that we're doing now, though, we continue to identify financial challenges facing children who attend school.'*

Respondent:

> *'[Interrupts] It is free. We don't pay for these [12YBE] students because it is free! [We] only support parents here.'*

# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

As we return to our central question, 'At what cost?', it is first important to note that children, parents, and other members of the community spoke about the value and importance of education for children in the community. But as this report has demonstrated, this commitment is not without significant sacrifice and cost—even in a fee-free system.

The overarching conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that *a wide range school-related costs operate, often overtly and sometimes clandestinely, within the lives of school-age children in Kiziguro Sector; where private financial and material inputs—such as uniforms, examination fees, and PTA contributions—function as a key and mediating determinant in the educational lives and trajectories of young people; and aspirations are adjusted accordingly.*

Particular attention must be drawn to the issue of PTA contributions.[18] Collectively, the data suggest that PTA contributions serve as a point of contention that directly impacted children's experience at school, and proved to be a troublesome challenge for head teachers as well. Two of the defining features of PTA—being a 'voluntary' costs and being 'agreed upon' by the PTA/PTC—seemed to be a challenging policy to implement in practice. On one hand, we sensed that head teachers felt obligated to enforce PTA contributions, because they represented a significant source of income for teachers who must also contend with the challenge of supporting themselves and their families. On the other hand, children and caregivers perceived PTA contributions as operating more or less like a fee—and a legitimate means for exclusion. While IPAR's (2012) recent study explored the heterogeneity of PTA contributions across differing geographic locations, our study sheds light on how the role of PTA can result in the differential experience of education *within* a particular school setting. In other words, PTA, and school costs more generally, continue to be a defining feature of the lives of children, even in a fee-free setting.

Study findings also helped to paint a picture of the aggregate number of costs that must be paid to attend basic education. We hope that this type of data may be helpful for developing a more complete understanding of some

18 Here we focus less on the actual monetary cost of PTA because this cost has been shown to vary substantially depending on geographic location (IPAR 2012)

of the material factors that may serve as constraints for children and families. Yet, there seemed to be few sources of support to address these materials challenges. There was a sense of isolation on the part of children, parents, and even school administrators in basic education: because basic education is fee-free, there was a perception that many NGOs have chosen to concentrate their energies elsewhere.

Study participants expressed concern about the situation facing school-age children not currently in school. These children were thought to be among the most vulnerable in the community, but few supports were identified. Reasons for leaving school were complex—often involving school costs such as uniforms, but further compounded by factors such as caregiver illness or heightened economic vulnerability. No longer in school, children often performed economic activities characterized as essential to household viability. The prospect of returning to school was rarely considered a viable option for caregivers or children, given the indirect and direct costs to the household in terms of school-related expense and agricultural production.

Study findings invite discussion about strategies through which the basic education system can continue to improve along the lines of access and equity. For example: What are the implications for user costs more generally? Is it appropriate to harmonize costs nationally? Is a means-tested approach to user costs viable? In a fee-free basic education system such as Rwanda's, how can the impact of the costs that remain outside this policy be identified and addressed? Because it is understood to be fee-free, do resources, donors, and/or NGO budgets overlook providing support to children in basic education—and by extension, to some of Rwanda's most vulnerable children?

## Recommendations

This study has been undertaken in the spirit of supporting the government in its ambitious quest toward universal access. To be sure, the impetus for this report must be explained in some ways as a product of Rwanda's own success in expanding basic education: fewer than twenty years ago, a study such as this, and the specificity of its focus on identifying and alleviating structural barriers within such a fee-free system, would have been difficult to imagine. Keeping these factors in mind, we conclude by offering the following recommendations.

- **Advocacy and awareness-raising measures should be taken to publicly (re) define 9/12YBE**

  Article 34 of the Official Gazette n° 31 of 30/07/2012 reads 'Primary school education is compulsory and free both in public and Government- subsidized schools. Free education refers to lessons freely offered to a student by a teacher as well as basic teaching aids.' Yet, we found a number of school-related costs required of children to attend school that would likely fall outside of what constitutes 'free education' as described above. As one local leader put it, *'I prefer the school fees schools to the free education schools ... When you compare free education and [the education system] when you had to pay school fees, the latter is cheaper.'* Mass media have contributed to a popular understanding that 9/12YBE is without users' cost to children and families. By clearly and explicitly defining what current policy does do, donors and other organizations can be in a better position to mobilize supports to address existing challenges.

- **Prepare an approximate budget to help families anticipate school-related costs**

  A boy in Senior 3 offered the following recommendation: '*If you know the amounts, you could even work for the amount in the holidays and save some money that you will be needing to pay during the school period.'* The data imply that it would be helpful for households to be able to more fully anticipate the total cost of attending school for an academic year in order to facilitate financial planning.

- **Revisit the purpose, structure, and implementation of PTA contributions**

  This research builds on existing scholarship to illustrate how the policy of voluntary PTA contributions operates on a local level (IPAR 2012). Gratitude was expressed by participants for the government's efforts to expand education access, and it was further recognized that schools and staff continue to operate with precious few resources. Yet, collectively, PTA was raised as a highly contentious issue in this case study. Some participants recommended increasing targeted support or waiving PTA contributions for the poorest. Others suggested eliminating PTA altogether and restructuring the system so that costs were more clearly understood and defined.[19]

19 In their "Implications and Recommendations" section of their report, IPAR (2012) offers some excellent policy considerations around the issue of parental contributions.

- **Develop national guidelines around coaching**

  The purpose and function of coaching was a point of concern for many study participants, particularly children. Coaching was understood as an essential educational feature for the 'serious student'. Yet, concern has been raised by some NGOs, for instance, that some aspects of the curriculum might be only covered during these coaching sessions, and that therefore, children are obliged to attend coaching if they are to learn the full curriculum. We see that coaching could benefit from parameters or guidelines set by MINEDUC.

- **Further examine how 12YBE schools are understood by local communities**

  The way children and parents spoke about education in Rwanda suggested the perception of a two-tier system: those who pass their national exams attend boarding schools, and those who fail their exam attend 9/12YBE (i.e. 'schools for those who fail'). As a boy in 12YBE put it, *'Because we are day students, so many people think that we are not intelligent. They don't know that there are some students who have succeeded national examination but who have failed to get money to go to boarding schools.'* It would be helpful to learn how widespread this characterization is beyond the geographic location of the current study, for such subjective understandings could have implications for children's (and communities') current engagement in school as well as educational aspirations.

- **Develop programming and policy to target children not currently in school**

  Concern was raised by study participants that little attention is focused on the situation of children who are not currently in school. In fact, at the outset of our study, a respected local leader who works with children questioned whether we would be able to locate any children at all; yet our study team, working in conjunction with leaders at the cell and village level, identified such children with relative ease. A better understanding is needed of ways to support these young people, including presenting them with viable opportunities to return to school if they wish.

- **MINEDUC and development partners must pursue evaluation strategies that account for the perspectives of children**

  Findings from this study provide a powerful illustration of children hav-

ing the opportunity to speak to a particular issue of clear importance to them. Failure to explore the issue of school costs with children would have likely yielded a much different picture of how school-related costs operate in schools and communities. Children, too, expressed their wish to be heard on this issue. As one boy stated, 'The leaders from the Ministry of Education should come here in the countryside to talk to students and teachers, listen to their problems and find solutions.'

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# APPENDIX 1:

# TABLES OF SCHOOL COSTS

## TABLE 1 COSTS FROM PRIMARY SCHOOLS (P6)*

| | | AMOUNT (FRW) | SAMPLE QUOTE FROM STUDENT IF COST IS NOT PAID |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Notebooks* | 100-200 rwf; 20-30 books per year | "The teacher says to the child you are not a student. Go home and tell your parents to give you books if not stay home until when they provide books to you." |
| **2** | Coaching* | 500-5000 rwf per month | "You see, the teachers teach and after a month you have to pay this one thousand yet sometimes you don't have it because you are poor or at times your father does not like the idea of a child going to school, so when you ask him, he will tell you that when he was studying he did not have that coaching you are telling him about. So you find that you will miss it and others will of course have to continue. Yet this coaching would help a weak child in class to catch up as well". |
| **3** | Exam papers* | 500 rwf per exam | "When you didn't pay this money and you finish P6 but you need academic papers to continue in secondary, they don't give you these papers. This causes you to stay home and discontinue your studies." |
| **4** | Haircut* | 100-300 rwf per month | "You know, when you come to school with long hair you are sent away yet there are children who cannot afford to get that 100 for the saloon, so your parents may decide to use scissors or a razorblade which is so embarrassing and a child may also refuse you to go to school like that". |
| **5** | Mathematical set* | 400-500 rwf (paid once) | "Sometimes, for example, when teachers send you away to buy mathematical set when you arrive at home because parent bought notebooks yesterday he will ask you to stay like three days and when you come back to school you will find that others have learned a lot". |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **6** | P6 Mock Exam* | 500-1000 rwf per period of exam | "When you didn't pay this money they don't allow you to sit for this exam. So you miss the exam." |
| **7** | Pants (girl) | 250 rwf each | "Sometimes we stay at home because we have like one pant you don't want to smell bad in class with other classmates there." |
| **8** | Pen* | 50-100 rwf; need red and blue; buy every two weeks | "The teacher sends you home to bring pens. If you don't get you stay home." |
| **9** | PTA* | 200-500 rwf per term; 600-1500 per year | "You will be told to bring your parent here at school and you will have to come back with the money". |
| **10** | Reports* | 50-200 rwf per year | "When you don't pay this money, you don't get your report form, then you don't get to know your marks at the end of the term and of course you don't know if you are to repeat or to join the next class." |
| **11** | Sanitary pads (girl) | 600-1200 rwf per month | "Of course you may not have them and when you are in your period it leaves a mark behind on your clothes and when other children notice it you will definitely get embarrassed"! |
| **12** | School bags | 200-2000 rwf | "Even school bags. It didn't happen to me but my friends were sent away. The headmaster told them at that carrying books in their hands without bags makes them get old very fast". |
| **13** | School Uniform* | 2600-4000 for one pair | "Sometimes the parents refuse to pay for it and teachers send you at home every day and this pushes you to leave forever." |
| **14** | Shoes* | 600-3000 rwf | "It is so clear and excusable that on the first day you can explain to your teacher that your shoes were worn out and maybe you are preparing to buy another one more pair, but you can't keep pleading with the teacher on the same issue daily, so what a student does is to stay home until you get what you are required to bring". |
| **15** | Toilet construction/ repair* | 1000-2000 rwf paid once | "You get sent home to bring your parents and gives explanations to the head master." |

*Indicates evidence of children being sent home or not allowed to attend school until this cost was rectified.

## TABLE 2 COSTS FROM 12YBE SCHOOLS (S3/S4)*

| | EXPENSE TYPE | AMOUNT (RWF) | SAMPLE QUOTE FROM STUDENT IF COST IS NOT PAID |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Accommodation and food during the time for national exams* | 5000 rwf | "There was a child that was in our class. He left the school to work for that money. But he paid only 3000 for registration for national examination and wasn't able to pay the other money [for accommodation and food]. So he just stayed home." |
| **2** | CD for literature class | 4000 buying and 500 hiring | "The teacher sends a child home to bring books." |
| **3** | District exam* | 1000 rwf each | |
| **4** | Exam book* | 300 rwf per year | "We don't understand this payment for a notebook for exams because when we come here at the beginning we paid 3000 for paper package and authorities were explaining that the package paper is for use during the exams. So we don't understand what all those package papers are doing – just sitting in the offices?" |
| **5** | Fine for not paying for report early | 1000 rwf | |
| **6** | Haircut* | 200 rwf per month | "You get sent home." |
| **7** | Notebooks* | 1500Rwf per book, and at least a S4 students needs about 6 books per year. | "We were really required to bring many materials [like notebooks] so I was not able to find them. That is why I dropped out of school." |
| **8** | Passport photos* | 500 rwf | "Even the ID requires a passport photo on it." |
| **9** | Pens* | 50-100 rwf each | "[If] they don't even have money for materials like notebooks, pens, and other things, the parent will tell the child to leave the school and wait until he gets the money." |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **10** | Photocopying notes | 40 rwf per page | "Those who can't afford to buy [the book] have to photocopy the whole book." |
| **11** | PTA* | 2000 rwf per term; 6000 rwf per year | "There are so many students who repeat a year just because of PTA." |
| **12** | Ream of paper* | 3000 (once at the beginning) | "I don't think it makes sense to miss classes because of such small things. But because they have no money, they will of course miss classes." |
| **13** | Registration fee* | 2000-6500 rwf | [We add up different fees and] "pay it at once." |
| **14** | Reports* | 100-300 rwf per year | "In my first term on my report the first name was not the same with the name I had on an official document … I had to pay 1000 for a new report." |
| **15** | Sanitary pads (girl) | 600-1200 rwf per month | "When you don't have them you cannot come to school and you know these parents will buy you only one packet sometimes." |
| **16** | School badge | 200-500 rwf | "You see also badges they said that they will send us away before letting us know the time." |
| **17** | School maintenance materials (hoe) | 1500 rwf | [A child] is sent home to bring a hoe." |
| **18** | Mock exams (S3) * | 1.000Rwf once a period of mock | [A child] is not allowed to sit for mock examination if fee is not paid. They may also be unable to sit if PTA is left unpaid." |
| **19** | National Exam registration fee (S3) * | 3000 rwf | [The student will be unable to sit for the national exam.] |
| **20** | Student Identity card | 350 rwf per year | [The teacher doesn't send us home] "but they said we will not national exams" [without the card]. |
| **21** | Uniform* | 6000-9000 rwf | "Sometimes you find [other children] don't have uniforms …. They are sent home." |

*Indicates evidence of children being sent home or not allowed to attend school until this cost was rectified.

## TABLE 3 COSTS FROM HIGH SCHOOL (A-LEVEL)*

| | EXPENSE TYPE | AMOUNT (FRW) |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | Bedcover | 4000 rwf |
| **2** | Bedsheets | 6000 rwf for two pairs |
| **3** | Books | 1500 rwf per book; 6 books per year |
| **4** | Bucket | 7500-1500 rwf |
| **5** | Calculator | 1000-1500 rwf |
| **6** | Haircut | 500 rwf |
| **7** | Health insurance | 3000 rwf per year |
| **8** | Hoe | 1500 rwf |
| **9** | Knickers | 400 rwf / each; need to buy 5 |
| **10** | Laboratory uniform | 5000 rwf |
| **11** | Mathematical set | 500 rwf |
| **12** | Mattress | 10000 rwf |
| **13** | Mosquito net | 1000 rwf |
| **14** | Pens | 50-100 (8 per month) |
| **15** | Petroleum jelly | 1200 rwf |
| **16** | Ream of papers | 3000 rwf |
| **17** | Sanitary pads | 2400 (4 packs) rwf |
| **18** | School fee* | 46000 rwf per term |
| **19** | Skin lotion | 1000 rwf per term |
| **20** | Slippers | 1000 rwf |
| **21** | Soap | 1000 rwf per term |
| **22** | Sports shoes | 3000-5000 rwf |
| **23** | Suitcase | 4000-5000 rwf |
| **24** | Toothpaste | 300Rwf once per term. |
| **25** | Transport | Varies |
| **26** | Uniform | 12000-15000 rwf |
| **27** | Washing soap | 1200 (4 bars) |

*Boarding schools are in a slightly unique position in that many of the school-related costs such as examination fees, school photos, haircuts, etc. are factored into their overall fee. If this fee is not paid, children will be sent home to come back with the amount owed.

# APPENDIX 2:

# CASE STUDIES OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

## CASE STUDY 1: LETTER TO MINEDUC, WRITTEN BY ANETTE, SENIOR 3 STUDENT IN 12YBE

*TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION:*

*Here at this school, education is not free. People say that education is free at our school because we pay less than those students who go to boarding school.*

*When I compute the cost of all school materials that I request to my parents, plus meals, there is no difference between my costs and the costs of those students who go to boarding school. People say we study for free because we pay school fees which is less than those who study at boarding school. (We pay 2000 rwf as PTA).*

*What I can say about my educational background is this: even though I studied in bad conditions I succeeded well with good marks from primary. It was a chance for me because we studied in French, so I received a support from my mother because she knows French. My mother explained to me what I did not understand in subjects. A challenge I faced was the shift from the French system to the English system. All subjects are conducted in English. It was not easy because my mother was not able to contribute to coaching me because she doesn't know English. Even though I had that challenge I did my best to do well in the national exam (P6) but I didn't succeed well. I wanted to do better than I did.*

*Then I was not able to continue on to the boarding school I had been sent to. But it is fine because I went back home to continue my studies at the Groupe Scolaire (9 Years Basic Education) because at that school children pay little money. So I was able to afford it.*

*Another thing I would like to tell you is this: we don't go home to boarding school, we go back home after class. There are students who live far away from school and have a very far walk. This is a discouragement for some students to continue attending class. I would like to make a request to you as leaders. It is to please open many schools nearby children to facilitate them going to school which is located at a distance less than 3km.*

*Thank you,*

*Annette*

## *CASE STUDY 2: MUTESI, AGE 18*[21]

*My name is Mutesi. I'm 18 years old. I live with both my parents. I have five siblings. The youngest is 13. He isn't in school either due to the uniform problem. He sold sorghum and beans to contribute, but when he got to Primary Two his uniform was torn and he couldn't return.*

*My mother is sick and my father is disabled. Every day I wake up at 5am to clean the house and collect grasses for our cow. The cow was a gift from the government. My grandmother also gave us a goat. I then go the garden become coming back to cook. Sometimes I can do handicrafts too. I like to make mats. I dig for food but the mats are a source of money for us. If I can, I cultivate for money, too. When I do they pay me 700 rwf for a day's work.*

*My father went to school up until Primary Five before leaving to go look for cows. His family had a lot of cows. He used to ask me to look through my books and he reads through. I once asked him why he did not continue with school. He said, he was the eldest, so he had to take care of the land and property. My mother, she dropped out after Primary Four. For me, I stopped school in 2009 during Primary Four because someone had stolen my uniform. I think it was my neighbors who stole it, but they told me it was a crazy man who had stolen it. But soon came planting season, and since I was the oldest so I had to go to the garden to prepare the field for planting. And it was too late for me to catch up with school.*

*When I had to leave the school, I saw my dreams crashing down. I always thought of myself as a doctor or a hero to my country. I saw myself helping my community. My aunt is a doctor, so I thought I would make it, too. I have a lot of memories of my time at school. I started school when I was ten. Even then I used to wake up to go bring water for my family and then clean the house before I went to school. At that time I could speak some English and French. I learned some different things like greetings. I also learned the multiplication table and how to count. I was even nominated as the class prefect because I was very attentive in class. One teacher would even ask me to find the children that did not attend school that day. She always wanted to know the problem. I always performed very well in class, too. I was among the top seven positions all the way through. My older sister never went to school. She still asks me to read letters for her.*

*But my mother was very sick, and I was worried in school all time, thinking I might find her dead. It was not easy for her. That is another reason why I left. But as I told you, my uniform was stolen. And I was expected to be in the garden. I approached my teacher and asked him if I could come without school uniform, but he said it was impossible. So I left. You would be beaten if you went without*

21 Composite narratives were prepared based on interview transcripts with the child and, when possible, their caregiver

*a school uniform. I was beaten two times and I stopped school after I received three spankings. I remember it well. We were three children at school – two girls and one boy. The headmaster called out for those who didn't have school uniforms, so we went forward and he made us lie down [to be beaten]. Those children also left school. Some work as masons now.*

*Now my thoughts are about capital. If I get enough from digging I would like to open up a small shop. I would like to go back to school, but I am the bread earner. If I left to go back to school now, who would dig for us? If there was someone to cultivate for us, I would love to go back to study though.*

## CASE STUDY 3: JEAN D'AMOUR, AGE 16

*I am called Jean D'Amour. I'm 16 and live in Kiziguro Sector. I stay with my father, mother and three sisters. My main job is helping my sisters. When I wake up, I go to fetch water. Then I go and get food from the garden. Sometimes I bring bananas, Irish potatoes and other types of food. After I will go to find different foods for the animals. I will go cut grass or take the animals out to graze. Then I will come back for lunch. I don't work for money right now. The work I do is to help out my family. Right now we are harvesting sorghum and beans. We just re-habilitated our house so we do not yet have electricity but the pole is near here. Maybe we'll have it in January.*

*There are a few organizations that support people in this area but for us, our family doesn't receive support. Sometimes the others, they get cows. Some get support for children in school, like giving them books and pens. I don't know what the criteria is to get support though.*

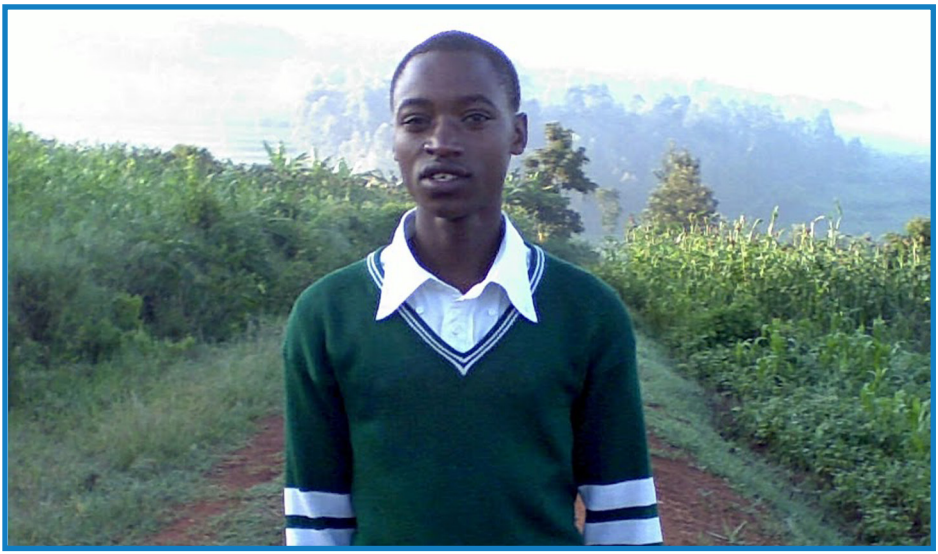
*I stopped school last term in Primary 6. In the beginning, I was a good student. I even moved in with my grandmother to be nearer to the school. Once I received a 94 in class and my mother rewarded me with 1000 rwf. I also love football. Our school won a competition once and we were given a medal. It made me really happy. That is my good memories.*

*Last term I was sent me away because I did not attend coaching. I didn't attend because it was very far away. When school started again, the school asked us to go for coaching, but I thought it was optional coaching, and I did not go. But then they asked me to leave the school. They asked me to bring my parent. I guess for that coaching we didn't have to pay anything but previous coaching they asked for money so I thought they would want it again.*

*I also fell sick around the same time and was one week delayed from beginning school. I told the teacher, but the teacher sent a student to my house with the message that if I don't start attending my name will be cancelled from the class list. I went in to explain but it was too late. I explained my situation to the head-master.*

*He asked me how many days of coaching I attended and I told him it was two weeks. So I'm out of school now waiting for national exam. One of my friends in the class brings her notes back for me. I have paid for the fee already and I have an exam registration number. I do hope to go back to school. If I get good marks, I hope to join O-Level. Maybe if I continue with school, I will be able to create my own job. One worry is that I will be short on money. Maybe my parents can help pay for school materials.*

*I don't know if the Ministry of Education is aware of children like me who have left the school. I don't think he knows the challenges facing children who have dropped out of school. For me, if I was mayor, I would try to provide good governance to support children out of school. I think there needs to be more understanding about the life of children who have left the school. They face different challenges.*



## CASE STUDY 4: CLAUDIA, AGE 18

*My name is Claudia. I am 18. My last year of school was P6. I live with my mother. It is just her and I. We work hard to get our money. When we dig our land, we wait until we have a good production. Then we can buy things like soaps or salt. When I wake up I clean at home and sweep the ground. After that I go to dig. When I come back I cook. After that I take a short rest. Then I start the evening works. I dig for others. They pay me. Other time I dig in our own land. I dig on our land about three times per week. The other days I find other ways to survive. Sometimes people come to find me and ask me to go and farm their lands and give me money which I use here at home for buying some materials. I get paid*

*about 600 rwf per day. I do this about two times per week.*

*My mother didn't go to school. As for me, I left in 2010 when I was in P6. I remember when I was at school I would wake up and go to fetch water. Then I would come back, sweep the grounds, and bathe very quickly before going to school. After school I would come back and do housework.*

*During school, I had good memories. On break time we would play handball. We also had a good teacher who told us stories. I really liked studying English. I can't remember a whole lot from the subject because it was so long ago! But I do remember, when we were in P4, we read a title called "Patricia opens the door." There was a part of the book that went something like this: "Be quiet Patricia. The baby is sleeping. Oh! I see!" I remember only that though. But me, I know now how to read. I can ready myself the billboard and find directions when I need it.*

*As early as P3, sometimes I was sick and not able to attend school. Other times I was absent because my mother was sick. And then there were other times that I didn't have notebooks and that is why I stayed at the house. When I had a problem of notebooks I just stayed at home. When I would go to school, it was a challenge because when others were busy taking notes, me I was sitting there trying to mem orize what the teacher was teaching. Today, the main reason I am not at* school is because of poverty. After national exams my mother was sick and I failed to get money to continue my studies. I had just finished P6 and was getting ready to go to secondary. But I didn't have school fees, uniforms and notebooks. No one told me to leave the school. It was a matter of poverty. When I get facility again, I hope to continue if possible. If I find someone to help me, I will go back to school. I could start in senior one in 9YBE.

*Sometimes it makes my mother sad that I'm not in school. We stay home together and I think she blames herself, saying 'you are here because I am not able to pay your school fees.' I really hope to continue in school. I think I could be a good journalist. I could get a good job and live in good conditions. I want to work at Izuba radio station. I know the journalist there, those like Thalien MBAUGUKRA, Emelienne KAYITESI and URANYINIGIRA Fortune. Sometimes they talk about funny things and also I like the sports program. Maybe I could also be a tailor too or a trader. But I need more education.*

*If I were a leader in the future, I would support the children in their education – paying for them things like fees, notebooks, and uniforms. In this area, we are so many children who have stopped our studies. Sometimes it is because of poverty. Sometimes it is because of bad behaviors. When we drop out, we just stay home.*

## CASE STUDY 5: MARIE, 72, grandmother of Nadiya, 20

*My name is Marie. I am 72 years old. I live in Kizguro Sector. I am the grandmother of Nadiya. She is 20. She is the one who takes care of all of us. She digs, she takes care of that cow. She is responsible for everything.*

*We live with my husband. We also have other children. One has completed secondary school and another one is still in Nine Years Basic Education, in Senior 3. Before we used to go look for a job or we dig and sell our products to the market. But now things have changed. I don't have energy to work now so life now days is a bit complicated. These days things around here are very good. Children are in schools. Everyone is smart. Many things, in a way, have changed. But they also sometimes lack love.*

*People of our times used to like one another. Take any example if your neighbor gives birth. Everyone around would support her and provides milk to the family. But today no one can support you. You just come from the hospital and then your house.*

*What I can say about my daughter Nadiya: We had no money to pay the school, and she was the one who was responsible for helping our family to survive. She is a smart girl. She knows how to read and write. But the main reason she left was money. Only money was the problem. She was supposed to pay 100 rwf. But do you think we were able to pay for two children? Impossible! So we have decided to have one continue. We decided to have her older brother continue. You see, school still requires a lot of money. There are many books that they use. There is the school uniform, too. So we said 'Let's have her stop and support the family.'*

*What I can say about the local leaders is that they have their own children who have dropped out of the class. So they don't say anything about Nadiya having left the school because they have their own problems. The main reason children drop out, in my view, is poverty. Everyone in this area knows that I like educating my children; even my first born who died was educated. But these days many people are very poor. I don't think if there is anyone who can fell happy when his or her child is out of the school. For Nadiya's future, what I can say is we don't have plans for her future. What we will give her this house. Only God knows her future though.*

## CASE STUDY 6: EGIDIA, AGE 17

*My name is Egidia. I'm 17. My last year in school was Primary 5. I stay with my mother and an older sister and older brother. It means I am the last born in the family. We also live with my mother's grandchildren. My mother and father divorced a long time ago. To get by, we sell local beer without alcohol (ubushera). We sell about 2 jerry cans per a day. In the morning I do home activities like cleaning, carrying water, collecting fire wood and cooking. We don't have cows. We have electricity where we live. It is so important. We use it for light and charging telephones. We even have a telephone. I use MTN and Tigo sometimes too.*

*My parents went to school. They know how to read and write. For me, I stopped going to school last May. I was in P6. When I was in P1, I was intelligent. P2 through P4 I also did well. When I was in P4 we moved from [other village] to here where I continued to P5 here and then P6. But going to school is really very important for me because I did not know to read but now I am able to read. I also know some calculations. I can remember well I was a student. I studied mathematics and Kinyarwanda. I was good at those subjects. Even now if you give to me an exam of mathematics I can answer some questions because I still remember many things in mathematics.*

*We received good education at school. I stopped going to school but it is not the school's fault. It depended by lacking financial capacity which was so limited. When we moved to this place because we were few people so it was necessary to help my family to cultivate. Plus, due to limited financial capacity it was not possible to find all school materials required. I was not able to pay every fees required by term. Every term they wanted 500 rwf and also notebooks. We were really required to bring many materials so I was not able to find them. That is why I dropped out of school. Sometimes I would go to school without materials like notebooks, but I would get sent home. It happened three times in three consecutive days. Then we came back to school then after one week we were sent home again. That is why finally I left school permanently.*

*My mother did not care about it. Even there are teachers who came here to ask me why I left school. Plus my older brother doesn't go to school. He is 18. He left after Senior 2 because he didn't have the fees.*

*Since I have left the school, I first wanted to go back. But if it is not possible I hope to come up with a project where I can use a sewing machine. I cannot sit doing nothing. I think it is important for children to learn vocational activities for those who are not able to continue their studies. If I was a leader, for those*

*who fail to go to school can learn other important things like sewing for girls and construction for boys.*

## CASE STUDY 7: VALENS, AGE 14

*I am called Valens. I am 14 years old and I live in Kiziguro Sector. I don't go to school right now.*

*I stay with my mother and father and my four other brothers and sisters. We live in a settlement. I like living here because we can help one another. Plus, there are people to play football with. For me, I like being on the attack when I am playing football. We have one cow. The government has given us the cow and we will give its calf to someone else. When I wake up in the morning I go to collect grasses for the cow, after that I go play football until evening. When the cow finishes eating its grasses in the morning, I go out and collect more grasses for it in the afternoon. That is my daily work. I'm not paid. It is how I help my family.*

*I used to go to school but when I got ill, I stopped. I was in P4. I remember being very interested in my studies. And I used to study very hard. I liked mathematics the best because I was able to understand. It is good to study I think because when you reach a sign post you will be able to read it. But I have forgotten how to read because I have not been in school. But I was ill for one week. When I went to school the teacher told me to go back home. He said 'go home because you are very lost to the extent that you can't catch up.' And I told him that I will put all my efforts and catch up, but he refused.*

*I'm hoping to go back in January. I will join P4. I think my parents will support me in this. They don't like a child who does not go to school. I think my future will be good because I am going back to school. You can't have a good life unless you go to school. If you don't go back to school, life is not good. You can become a hooligan. These are the children who don't obey their parents.*

*If I was a leader, the first thing I would do is to tell children to stop fighting. Then I can take all children in schools and tell them to obey their parents. I would also stop them from watching television.*

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